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# SOCIAL TRAINING THROUGH SCHOOL GROUP ACTIVITIES

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Current educational practice is marked in very many localities by much attention to the social relations incident to the work of the school. More and more are teachers appreciating the educational possibilities of these social relationships. The major part of this paper is to be devoted to a presentation of some of the more important and suggestive attempts to secure really valuable results from school group activities. It may be proper, however, to state briefly, by way of introduction to what is to follow, the general principles on which the social values depend.

## THE INFLUENCE OF THE GROUP UPON THE INDIVIDUAL

It is a truism of social psychology that the individual is controlled to a certain extent by the group to which he belongs. This tendency to be influenced by the group pattern, or ideal, occurs not merely with adults but in an especially striking manner with children as they approach the teen period. This control of the group, while not always an unmixed blessing, may easily become a valuable educative agency. The evil of it would appear of course in those cases in which the group pattern chances to be a bad one, and also when, if ever, the youth is simply impressed with the social pattern with the result of suppressing his own individuality. Thus, while it may be a good thing for the boy or girl to be restrained from undesirable behavior by belonging to a group which does not approve of such a mode of action, it is good mainly in the proportion in which the youngster grasps the approved line of conduct as an ideal and, instead of merely obeying the mandate of the group, actively embraces the attitude expressed by his companions and finds in it genuine self-expression.

In other words, group control, to be really educative, must prove to be a stimulus to the self-activity of the individual, some-

thing that really arouses the individual to fruitful action where he would otherwise have been inactive. If the group control is exerted along broadening and profitable lines it will have much real educational value for every person who participates. This educative value obtains wherever worthwhile groups are formed, outside of school as well as within. With the activities of children outside of the school we shall not here attempt to deal. It is sufficient to say that the literature describing the doings of gangs, clubs, etc., is replete with illustrations of the educative values of group activities.<sup>1</sup> We shall here pass at once to the problems of this sort presented by the school.

All school life, with its classes, its study-room groups, its playground, its school spirit and its class spirit, is a continuous process of social education through group action. The educational values of these more informal school activities we may also pass over. It has been partly from a recognition of the power of the group, even though exerted quite without premeditation, to shape the character of the individual that many constructive thinkers and practical workers in the fields of both secondary and elementary education have sought to make more definite use of this social force. Another motive has undoubtedly been largely present in all such efforts, namely, the purely practical desire to hold within reasonable bounds the insistent social tendencies of young people. Social activities there will be, whether the teacher plans for them or not, and the impulse for much of the constructive development which has recently occurred is doubtless due to the need of facing the practical situation of a lot of embryonic social groups and *directing* their expression so there may be a minimum of undesirable consequences. However, be the causes what they may, the present-day school is rapidly coming to an appreciation of the educational significance of school activities of the social type.

#### TYPES OF ORGANIZATION FOR SOCIAL TRAINING

There is a wide range in the variety of efforts that are now being made to promote a valuable social life in the school. Many principals have been giving much patient attention to feasible ways

<sup>1</sup> See Gunckel, *Boyville*; Buck, *Boys' Self-governing Clubs*; Burkheimer and Cohen, *Boys' Clubs*; Puffer, *The Boy and his Gang*.

and means. A great deal of thought has been given to the proper administering of student activities in high schools.<sup>2</sup> Some high schools have teachers especially charged with the duty of supervising and developing the social activities of the students. As to specific types of development the following may be considered as inclusive of much that is being currently attempted:

1. The socialization of classroom work.
2. The development and supervision of group activities outside the classroom.
3. Student participation in school government.

The success, that is to say the educational value, of all such undertakings depends finally on the *esprit de corps* which may be expected to develop in the class or school and which will supposedly furnish a social stimulus for more energetic action on the part of the pupils along the lines planned and to some extent suggested by the school authorities.

#### THE SOCIALIZATION OF CLASSROOM WORK

We shall consider first the somewhat wide range of activities which may be included under the socialization of the work of the classroom. The purpose of all such efforts is to throw more responsibility upon the pupils for the conduct of their work, to teach them social coöperation and group spirit by making the work of the classes more of the nature of coöperative undertakings. In such a class the teacher and the pupils form a real social group, the teacher a leader and stimulator in the general group activity but leaving much to the initiative of pupils in the planning of the conduct of the class, in finding problems, and in methods of solving them.

PROFESSOR SCOTT'S EFFORTS.—One of the earlier efforts to develop and demonstrate the effectiveness of the group as a means of stimulating learning processes was that of Professor Colin Scott, described by him in detail in his *Social Education*. The essential features of Scott's plan consisted in giving opportunity to children (first of the third grade and later in various higher grades including high and normal schools) to organize on their own

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XVI in Johnston's *Modern High School*, for a suggestive account of the problem and a suggested method of administering, prepared by Prin. Jesse B. Davis of the Central High School, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

initiative into small groups for the purpose of carrying on any activity which interested them jointly. For the younger children short periods during the school session were allowed for this "self-organized group work," as Scott calls it. The problems chosen by the children seem to have been rather definitely along the line of legitimate school interests. There were printing, cooking, photographic, dramatic and manual arts groups and others. The condition on which any self-constituted group was permitted to undertake work of its own choosing was that the work be approved by the teacher and quite definitely planned both as to method and time required by the children proposing it. Each project launched under these conditions was carried out by the children without interference by the teacher even to save it from threatened failure. The children learned to plan and to work coöperatively. They experienced and learned to overcome many of the real difficulties which are apt to develop in any group enterprise. The social training incident to this type of work had unquestioned value and the social motivation to intellectual effort and to manual dexterity made it a very effective method of "learning" in the narrower meaning of that term. In fact one cannot but feel, in reading the account, that in some respects the learning was *more effective* than that which occurs in formal class instruction.

THE PARKER SCHOOL EXPERIMENTS.—Another set of illustrations of the social and more narrowly educational values of group work may be found in a monograph entitled, "The Social Motive in School Work," issued by the faculty of The Francis W. Parker School, Chicago, in 1912. There are here given many significant illustrations of small children's capacity to plan and carry out group enterprises. A special part of the school yard was set aside as "investigation lane" for these group projects, which seem to have been mostly house building enterprises. The *Year Book* of this same school for the next year (1913) tells how groups of children assumed responsibility for the morning exercises and gives many illustrations of how these groups planned and carried out interesting demonstrations for the entertainment and instruction of their mates.

HISTORY IN THE CHARLESTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS, HIGH SCHOOL.—The projects thus far described have paved the way for the more definite socialization of class work by showing that group

work with a large amount of self-direction is not only possible but quite worth while, whether it be considered from a social or from a narrowly intellectual point of view. One of the earlier attempts at socializing class work is described by Miss Lotta Clark, a history teacher in the Charlestown, Mass., High School.<sup>3</sup> As this work of Miss Clark is well known it will be given only brief mention here but any reader who is unfamiliar with it would do well to consult the suggestive account of it given in Miss Clark's own words. In brief, the plan, which has been in operation for some thirteen years and has been adopted by other teachers in the same school, consists in the organization of the class into a parliamentary club, with chairman and secretary appointed by the class and changed at regular intervals. The recitations were made not in response to questions but were voluntary offerings. The class formed a coöperative group for the study of history in which not merely was the text studied but much outside material was brought in according to the differing interests and abilities of the members of the class. Thrown on its own initiative, the class made rapid progress, did the work thoroughly, and covered much more ground than had been covered by previous classes.

One of the marked characteristics of such group activity is its zestfulness, the energy displayed by the pupils in following up their self-imposed tasks. Teachers testify to their surprise at finding what such classes are capable of doing. Miss Clark says that she learned that "no teacher is equal to the dynamic force of the class before her." In most classes this dynamic force is slumbering because of the abnormal and artificial social conditions imposed upon them. Group work and group responsibility seem to awaken a response, an energy, a resourcefulness in pupils that seldom appears in the ordinary, formal, teacher-conducted recitation. In this connection, Miss Alice L. Marsh, at the conclusion of a suggestive description of her experience in socializing classroom activity, says, in commenting upon a surprising ability which had come to the surface in a boy in one of the groups, "I've a notion that Henry (and I might have added with truth, every boy and girl) has more in him than either you or I have ever succeeded in bringing out."<sup>4</sup> This is a common observation of those who have tried to utilize the

<sup>3</sup> "A Good Way to Teach History," *School Review*, 17: 255.

<sup>4</sup> "Socializing Influences in the Classroom," *The English Journal*, 5: 89.

group spirit and the social motive. Children are surprisingly resourceful and energetic when they are given a chance to do something for themselves.

ENGLISH IN THE EASTERN HIGH SCHOOL, DETROIT.—In the following paragraphs we give a condensed account of Miss Marsh's efforts to cultivate a social and coöperative spirit in her English classes in the Detroit Eastern High School. She first sought to arouse the friendly group spirit among the pupils by enlisting the help of the boys, under the direction of one or two especially capable ones, in the renovation of the rather shabby furniture of the classroom, and by having a social hour for the girls in which two were asked to present some facts from the life and work of Jane Addams. After taking several steps in the development of a social consciousness, she proposed to her five English classes that they organize as literary societies. These societies were conducted according to parliamentary usage.

The minutes of the literary societies stimulated the making of special reports, and I therefore kept my eyes open for points that would be of interest to different types of students. One student reported on a short but very thrilling story on the treatment of political prisoners in Russia. . . . This started two lines of research: one on "Prison Reform" and the other on "The Characteristics of the Russian People." The latter was managed by a young man, a Russian Jew, unusually intelligent, who had been in this country three years. His choice and arrangement of topics were fine. . . .

The two boys in charge of "Prison Reform" were of the type that not only manage to get their lessons and keep track of the progress of the recitation, but at the same time make life miserable for the teacher. I made them into a team and sent them to investigate the neighboring branch libraries. I gave them a hint about *Poole's Index* and *The Reader's Guide*. They came back jubilant the next day, having spent the previous afternoon in the quest. Their list included twenty-seven references, neatly arranged. . . . These two boys continued as chairmen, assigning topics and seeing to it that someone was ready to report each day.

We included debates in our work, discussing labor questions, municipal ownership of railways and kindred topics. . . .

The further work of these classes covers a considerable range of topics and gives evidence of much initiative on the part of the students. Among other things each class edited a newspaper as a means of vitalizing the work in old English and Scotch ballads.

The students organized among themselves. Five members of each class were chosen by ballot to act as the editorial staff. Each of these in turn selected

five students to work with him, in soliciting material and in building up some department of the paper. Under their strenuous efforts talent which I had never suspected came to light. They studied details and produced editorials on the outrages perpetrated by the Lowlanders, and kindred topics.

For each special ability there were opportunities for expression, joke columns, typewriting for those who knew how, artistic headlines from those skilled in lettering, cartoons and illustrations from the students gifted in drawing; the girls furnished the society notes.

The chairmen came to me and said there were some who had done little or nothing by way of coöperation. "Do you want me to interfere?" I inquired. "I should really like to have you see the whole thing through yourselves, if it were possible." What arguments were used or what persuasion was brought to bear on these delinquents I have no means of knowing, but eventually *all* had helped and the papers, "our" papers, were completed.

This account is quoted at some length to give some idea of the details of special phases. Miss Marsh in a letter writes further of the expansion of the socialized ideal the following year. The club idea spread to other classes and much attention is given to problems of civic and social welfare which the pupils are face to face with in their every-day life.

COMPOSITION WORK IN SHORTRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL, INDIANAPOLIS.—The following account of a socialized type of class work being developed in the Shortridge High School of Indianapolis is given through the courtesy of Mrs. Rose M. R. Mickels of the Department of English.<sup>5</sup>

The experiment herein described was made with a view to improving composition work. The lessons in literature were delightfully informal and inspiring, but composition classes were less successful. I therefore resorted to this plan, which I tried out in several classes, ranging from English III to English VII. What follows describes the work of an English VII class. This class numbered thirty. I divided the class into six groups of five pupils each. One member of each group was asked to act as presiding officer for that group.

On Monday of each week the six groups distributed themselves about the classroom and began work. The president called his group to order and inquired whether all had done the assigned work. If anyone was unprepared, the president informed me when I made my rounds. Then the members read to one another their work. This was commented upon, at first as to interest. I soon discovered that every member was eager to be found interesting. Themes of unusual interest were found and reported to me. They were later read in the class. The president

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<sup>5</sup> Communicated by Mrs. Della McCurdy Thompson, of Shortridge High School, Adviser of Girls.



of the division heard criticisms on sentence structure and advised on doubtful points in punctuation, and other matters of form. At the close of the period he took up the themes belonging to his group for an inspection of the written work. His own theme he gave to the members of his own group in turn. The president's theme was expected to be a model, but members of the group were free to criticize it in any way it needed.

I spent the class hour in going from group to group. Sometimes a section would have something so good that it could hardly wait for my visit. The best things were read to me and points on which the groups could not agree were referred to me. I have found that the president is especially delighted when some member of a group who has not been a credit to it begins to improve. The whole group, indeed, exults in his success and is eager to have me know of his improvement. Sometimes I find in a group a certain error that the entire class needs to consider. When this happens I call attention and explain the point. The intimacy to which the pupils admit me is surprising and I find that this tones down my criticism. I can offer it as only one friend to another.

As this plan involves considerable extra work for the presidents I have recognized this by a slight addition to their term grades, but the extra credit, I think, affects their interest very little. They do the deed for the deed's sake.

We also kept a record of our outside reading. This furnishes us with a common interest, for when one finds an unusually good story or book, he naturally wants the group to share in his pleasure. This class read more in this term than any other class I have ever had.

I took up the written work about once a month, looked it over and graded it. I was surprised to find how little I had to correct in the way of faulty sentence structure, punctuation or spelling. This left me free to comment on other things, method of presentation, diction, etc. I never asked the members of the group to grade the papers they corrected. A pupil who was failing was reported to me privately by his president and I gave him at once such aid as I could. As a matter of fact we had but one failure in the class. He had had a long record of failures to which he added in this case, by leaving school before the end of the term.

I never asked the class how they liked the experiment. We had a number of visitors who were deeply interested in our work. When they wanted information I turned them loose among the class. I never asked them what they learned there, but they usually insisted upon telling me of the enthusiasm they found. At the close of the term a number of personal notes were placed on my desk. They had been written by the group presidents in behalf of their respective groups to thank me for the freedom and enjoyment our methods of work had given them. They said that the work had been unusually hard but that it had also been unusually stimulating and helpful. Several difficulties presented themselves, indeed one may see at a glance that the plan is far from perfect. It works better with older pupils. It is sometimes difficult to find the right students for leadership. It does not always cure ingrown laziness on the part of certain individuals. But it does what I expect it to do. It enables us to be mutually helpful and to accomplish even more in theme writing than was possible by the old method.

THE PRINCIPLE APPLIED IN A GEOMETRY CLASS.—One of the writer's former students has furnished him with an account of a self-conducted geometry class which showed the same spirit of initiative and ability to plan and push its work forward that Miss Clark found in her history classes. This class finished its text three weeks sooner than other classes had done and did besides much original and outside work of its own devising.

One morning I learned that a contest had been planned. The girl who made the neatest geometrically designed doily or centerpiece, and the boy who drew the best plan for the school grounds were each to receive pennants. The most interesting feature of this experiment was the class spirit. There was always a spirit of wholesome competition as well as a determination to stand by one another and give proper assistance to the weaker pupils, so that all might complete the course. One weak student dropped out of the class after trying in vain to do the work. This was a genuine disappointment to the other members of the class who had worked so hard to save her. Many times through the year the pupils expressed themselves very strongly in favor of having their other teachers adopt the plan used in this geometry class as a better means of getting them into the subjects. At the end of the semester one of the boys said that he considered the experience he got from the self-conducted geometry class as worth \$600.00 invested at 6 per cent interest, compounded annually.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT AND SUPERVISION OF GROUP ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM

These are naturally of the widest variety and afford even more opportunity than does the socialized class for individual initiative, leadership and social coöperation. We have already referred to the problem of supervision and as that phase is only indirectly connected with the present paper we shall say nothing further about it. Supervision is of course necessary that the best educative values may be realized. The social values are loyalty, lawfulness and coöperation. Besides this the members of such groups have their intellectual outlook broadened and enriched. In comparatively small schools some interesting work is being done to weld the school as a whole into a true social group. Miss Wilson, principal of the Crawfordsville (Indiana) High School, writes of her school as having the spirit of a large family. The girls are organized into a "Sunshine Club" which does much for the social interests of the school and of the community. The boys coöperate as honorary members. The "family reunions" of this school do much to keep alive the

spirit of social solidarity the influence of which upon the individual is marked.

**CLUB ACTIVITIES IN THE LINCOLN NEBRASKA HIGH SCHOOL.**—In the larger schools the subordinate groups are essential to the development of the social life. The vice-principal of the Lincoln, Nebraska, High School writes thus of their development of student activities:

The most extensive activity is the Nebraska Radio Association, a group of Lincoln High School boys who meet weekly, have parliamentary drill and discuss wireless telegraphy. They have at several of their homes some very complete and expensive wireless apparatus, so that they can listen to government messages from Tampa and other long distances. Many of these boys have become exceptionally skillful and could easily obtain positions with the government if they so desired. This is an interesting illustration of a practical intellectual benefit due largely to the coöperative activity of a self-organized group. . . .

Another thing that we are doing in Lincoln High School is to divide all the students into "home-room" clubs. The student reports at this home room when he comes in the morning. Here the roll is taken and on Monday mornings they spend a forty-minute period in this home room. Each teacher may use this forty minutes as desired. In some rooms they use the time studying but in others they have organized clubs for special purposes, in one room for pleasure, in another for baseball, but the one I have in mind to especially tell you about is the one where they have organized a club for the purpose of raising money to assist needy students. In this club they are really doing something for somebody else and it brings about a democratic feeling in a work which benefits themselves in doing for others.

Then we have various high school organizations such as the Ciceronian Debating Society which meets bi-weekly for parliamentary drill and debate. During the year they also have parties and suppers and occasionally a dance. The largest organization is the Junior Civic League. In the High School this includes all the Freshmen. In the Grade Schools it includes all the upper grades. They study home civic conditions and several times a year they make excursions to various points of interest about the city for the sake of learning about their home town. A number of divisions of this league have started to do some special thing for their section of the city. I am enclosing a little paper, "The Civic Standard" which will give you some idea of what they are trying to do.<sup>6</sup>

**STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS AT THE SIOUX CITY HIGH SCHOOL.**—In the Sioux City, Ia., High School among other student organizations there is one called the Hi-Y boys which, while organized by the secretary of the Y. M. C. A.,

is made up entirely of high school boys, not necessarily members of the Y. M. C. A. These boys meet every Friday evening at the high school at six o'clock where

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted from a letter from Vice-principal J. J. Marshall, Lincoln, Neb.

they have a light luncheon in the lunch room for which there is a charge of 15 cents. They usually have a speaker for the occasion. Recently they had a "dad and sons' meeting" where every boy was expected to bring his father. This was very successful. Their motto is clean speech, clean living, clean athletics. This club of boys has done more to clean up athletics and to bring about a desire on the part of many boys for higher living than a group of men could do in years. Most of the boys have signed an agreement to refrain from cigarette smoking. While many have slipped back it has nevertheless been a lever which the club has used to help pull themselves away from the habit.

The girls' friendship club ought to promote cleaner living and cleaner thinking on the part of the girls and I think it will. The literary societies give our boys and girls opportunity to develop along declamatory and debating lines. The question has often been put to me by college professors who have had some of our students, "Why are your students so strong on their feet and so much more able to express themselves than students from many other high schools?" I have decided that this ability is largely due to the clubs.

Our work in student musical organizations tends to develop along lines that are a little higher than those developed in athletics and opens up a new vista to many who thought they had no musical ability whatsoever. Our school plays have the same effect. A number of boys who did very poor work in their studies before they took up music have become much better students since taking up this and other forms of group work. Athletics help to keep more of our boys in school. Many who would drop out at the end of the first year or who would flunk along semester after semester manage to pull through so long as they have the athletic goal before them.<sup>7</sup>

OVER-SOCIALIZED HIGH SCHOOLS.—One practical feature of all student social activities is that of their cost both in time and money. Their reasonable limitation in these particulars provides an important means of training for high school pupils. There is no doubt that the student activities of many high schools are excessive and this has caused some critics to raise the question as to whether they should not be suppressed altogether. On this point Principal McCowan, quoted above, has this comment:

I feel that there are, very often, over-socialized high schools. When I came to Sioux City six years ago the social organizations were running riot. Each organization was permitted to have as many social affairs during the school year as it pleased. There was no limit to the expense. Reports from the parents of some of the pupils brought out the fact that the social life of the high school was costing many of them twenty-five to thirty-five dollars a year. A parent in one case, who had a daughter in school, complained that her assessments and dues had amounted to twenty-five dollars. The expenses of the boys were naturally higher. For some of the parties given by the boys' clubs the assessment was five

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted from letters from Principal J. S. McCowan, of the Sioux City, Iowa, High School.

dollars apiece, and two dollars was very common. *Now*, the *annual* expense to each member must not *exceed* two dollars. No assessments are permitted. Club parties used to cost \$250.00, now no club is permitted to spend more than \$55.00. I think the cause of the excesses lay in the fact there was no faculty supervision. Clubs used to be allowed to do exactly as they pleased without any suggestion from the authorities. Suggestions were resented. Some parents were forced to take their children from school because of the expense of the social life.

I think, however, that properly directed student activities are a very fine thing for American boys and girls. In order that they may have the greatest value, however, they must be properly directed and controlled or, instead of the results being good, they can be only bad.

COMMENTS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS.—In the following paragraphs are given the opinions of college students as to the benefits they derived from student activities in their high school days. It will be noted that they emphasize the value of the training in responsibility through self-directed enterprises and the tendency of such organizations to develop democratic coöperation among different types of students. These two points perhaps include much of the value of student activities.

The one social activity of my high school life which I recall as of most value was the senior class play. The entire responsibility for the play was taken by the class. They made their arrangements for a coach, for a theatre and for the advertising, all, however, subject to the approval of the principal. Every phase of the undertaking was discussed enthusiastically and without restraint by the whole class. We all gave our ideas and all had our parts both as individuals and as members of committees. Much democratic feeling was developed by these plays. One should also mention the awakening of the spirit of united effort and the subordination of the self-interests for the common good.

Another student writes of the *business* as well as *literary* experience she derived from work upon the school paper. The following account of the work of the literary societies in a school, while presenting nothing unusual, does illustrate the energetic way in which pupils take hold of the self-conducted enterprises.

One illustration of the coöperation that developed among the students of these societies is that of a "Fair" given by my society in one of the halls of the town on a Saturday. Money was needed by the high school for books for its library and each society contributed to the fund. For six weeks we prepared for this "Fair." Committees were appointed, each being responsible for some phase of the undertaking. Each student had some particular part at certain time. All helped to decorate the hall. Each borrowed furniture from some one in the community and was responsible for the care and return of it. The girls made

aprons and cakes and donated them to the society. The girls were divided into groups of three or four each one of which had to make at least one dollar's worth of sugar into candy.

Various other preparations are noted which need not be repeated. Every high school in the country could give such illustrations. Their value as a means of social training is unquestioned.

EXPERIMENTS NOW IN PROGRESS.—The limitations of time and space do not permit of the offering of much other material on student activities. In larger schools they are usually elaborately developed but they do not reveal any differences in principle from those in the smaller schools. The inquiries directed by the writer to persons interested in these things in high schools shows that in the main the teachers are absorbed in the rather insistent problems of sponsorship and general oversight and have not yet learned to evaluate the results or to measure them in any very definite way. All sorts of interesting experiments are today being tried out and when these are adequately reported we shall know much more that is worth while regarding the social-educational values of such types of effort.

#### STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL GOVERNMENT

Of this phase of group action we shall here say little. It has been widely advertised and discussed and represents, in the writer's way of looking at it, a very important character-forming influence. Group responsibility for a good school is fostered and the control of the group over the individual is well illustrated.

While there are many schools both elementary and secondary which are trying with success various forms of pupil-participation in school government, there is still a surprising ignorance of and prejudice against the idea in the minds of many school-men. No one movement accomplishes more for practical moral education than does this and moral education is admittedly the greatest need of American education today. When we reflect upon the social and moral needs of our school children we cannot but feel that an undue amount of time is being spent upon questions of administration and on courses of study which have little ultimate significance for character formation, the one great problem before our country at the present time.